Cultural Interchange Between India and China

An Address

BY

Prof. Tan Yun-Shan

THE SINO-INDIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY

CHUNGKING AND SANTINIKETAN

Second Edition.

Price -/4/-

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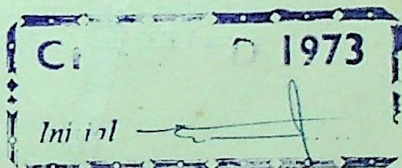
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PAMPHLET NO. 1. Second Edition. Price -/4/-

1940.

First Published in the Modern Review 1934.
Published as a Pamphlet, April, 1937.
Second Edition, April, 1940.

CULTURAL INTERCHANGE BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA

An Address

Gurudeva and Friends,

I am glad to come back to India and stay with you once again. I have carried no gifts for you from beyond the seas ; I have with me merely my enthusiasm and the sympathy of my heart and the enthusiasm and sympathy of my people which I offer to you in all humility.

Time flies as fast as the darting arrow. It has been three long years since I left India for my Fatherland. But during this long interval, there was not a day when I did not think of India, specially not a moment when I did not think of this beautiful beloved Visva-Bharati at Santiniketan. I left Santiniketan just like a bee leaving its hive. I love Santiniketan as much as my native village ; I love India also as much as my Fatherland. This time, when I left my native village and my Fatherland for India and for Santiniketan a second time, it is just the same to me as if I returned from India and Santiniketan to my Fatherland and my native village three years ago. The objective facts are opposite, but my sentiments are the same. Hence my pleasure to be here is really beyond the expression of the symbolic words which I can use.

India and China are naturally a pair of sister countries. Their similarities and their associations are great, numerous, and intimate. Looking over the geography and history of all the nations in the world, we find there are not any other two nations that can be compared to our two countries. This is true from every respect and from every standard of observation and judgment.

Our two countries, both situated in the bright and glorious continent of Asia, India to the south west and China to the north-east, spread out lordly in different directions but yet are linked up at the main line, just like the two wheels of a carriage or the two wings of a bird, and, even better to say, like the two hands and feet or the two ears and eyes of a person. And the Himalayas, gigantic and majestic, brilliant and magnificent, exactly resemble the common backbone, or the shoulders or the neck, and also the nerve system of theirs. Though their boundaries are marked off, yet the physical shape is similiar.

A Chinese proverb speaks of "an extensive land with a multitudinous people." Both India and China have actually possessed them. Besides, the soils of our two countries are fertile, beautiful and productive ; the peoples honest, frugal and industrious. The products of soils and the outputs of labour are sufficient not only to maintain our own national existence but also to contribute to international prosperity.

Our civilizations started from the misty, ancient times, that is, many thousands of years ago. According to the orthodox historic accounts in Chinese, the formal establishment by Huang-Ti of a United Empire in China was accomplished in 2697 B. C., so that this present year 1934 is the year 4631 in the Chinese calendar of orthodox history. But the pre-historic periods must have been

long and full of events. Some old books assert that Chinese civilization began about eighteen thousand years before Huang-Ti; others even go so far as to say that our rudimentary culture appeared fifty thousand years prior to the formation of Huang-Ti's Empire. Such remarks my be true, but the recorded facts are a little too remote to be reliable. It is only after the reign of Huang-Ti that the epochs, systems and deeds can be clearly investigated and verified, so that there is no more room for any doubt at all. About India, the historical records of very ancient times are rather insufficient but according to references in Chinese books on Buddhism, the condition of ancient India was roughly similar to that of ancient China. Modern scholars have proved from investigations that the date of the first appearance of the Vedas can not be less than 2,000 B. C. to 3,000 B. C., and consequently no one can be sceptical of the early civilization of India. The invention of the written language is the most essential element of civilization, and a knowledge of such invention is a clue to the understanding of the history of civilization of any nation. The system of Chinese written language came into perfect existence at the time of Huang-Ti; so it follows that such language must have budded and evolved for a long time before that period. Arguments and proofs are found in abundance in old Chinese books and classics, so numerous that I have no space here to quote them all. In a Chinese book by the name of "Fa-Yuan-Chu-Lin" or "Pearls of Buddhist World," written by a famous monk named Tao-Shih in the Tang Dynasty, we find a beautiful passage about the system of Indian written language. It says briefly:

> "In ancient times, there were three great inventors of written languages: the first was Brahma, whose way of writing was from the left to the right; the second

> was Kharu, whose way of writing was from the right to the left ; the third was Ts'ang-Chia, whose way of writing was from top to bottom."

What is here meant by Brahma is the inventor of Sanskrit ; by Kharu, the inventor of Kharosthy ; by Ts'ang-Chia, the inventor of Chinese words, who was also an official in the government of Huang-Ti. In reality, Ts'ang-Chia was not the man who created, but the man who edited and compiled the Chinese written language. It is also stated in the book just quoted that :

> "Brahma was the eldest ; Kharu, the next ; both living in Tienchu (India) ; and Ts'ang-Chia, the youngest, living in the Middle Kingdom (China)."

Now then, the time for the creation of Indian written language must be undoubtedly far earlier than the age of Asoka, or at least corresponding to the period when Ts'ang-Chia compiled the system of Chinese written language. Recently, archæologists have made considerable discoveries in India, and I hope what I have just mentioned may be verified by some new concrete evidences. It is now very clear that the ages and facts of the beginning of Indian and Chinese civilizations are somewhat similar to each other.

The true old civilized nations of the world are four in number : Egypt and Babylonia, India and China. But ancient Egypt and Babylonia have become at present mere vague terms in history. Not only have their original peoples dwindled away, but also their civilizations paled into the twilight of the dim past ; their lands and their cities are affording only materials for archæologists to dig out, and only a subject-matter for scholars and poets to sing and mourn for ever. There are also many other younger nations which come and go, rise and fall. Only our two countries, India and China, have stood up firm and high from the very beginning to the present day for thousands

of years already. Though our lands have many times been trampled down, devastated and usurped by foreign peoples politically and economically, yet our superior traditions, teachings, systems, and customs have often assimilated the wild, barbarous invaders and made them educated and cultured, so that our two countries are able to survive others and shine permanently. Such are the great singular characteristics in the histories of India and China only.

Again the elementary spirit of the Chinese national character is "Benevolent love" and "Polite deference", which may be represented by the word "Jen" or perfect virtue. The essential spirit of the Indian national character is "mercy" and "peace", which, may be represented by the word "Ahimsa". These four terms, "benevolent love" and "polite deference", "mercy" and 'peace", though different in form, are yet fundamentally the same in sense. The life of the Chinese adheres to to the "Golden Mean", so their attitude towards Nature is a process of harmonization. The life of the Indians lays stress upon "Continence", so their attitude towards Nature is a process of assimilation. The Chinese have a custom of worship of their ancestors, and love of their kinsmen, so that the system of big families is able to exist generation after generation. And this is the case with the Indian people too. The Indians have the inclination to stick to their native land, honour their teachers and respect their elders. And this is the case with the Chinese people too. In social intercourse the Chinese emphasize "justice" and "uprightness"; despise "advantage" and "disadvantage." And so do the Indian people. In relationships between man and woman, the Indians observe "chastity" and prize "modesty". And so do the Chinese people. In addition

to such moral standards, the teaching of our sages at different times are very much similar on the whole. Confucius set up the "Wu-Ch'ang" or Five ethical laws: first, "Jen" or benevolence ; second, "Yi" or uprighteness ; third, "Li" or propriety ; foutrh, "Chih" or wisdom ; fifth, "Hsin" or faithfulness. Varadhamana Jina and Sakyamuni Buddha both preached five ascetic rules or "Pancha Silani" ; those of Jina are first, "speak the truth" ; second, "live a pure, poor life" ; third, "nonkilling" ; fourth, "non-stealing" ; fifth, "observe chastity" ; and those of Buddha are first, "non-killing" ; second, "non-stealing" ; third, "non-adultery" ; fourth, "non-lying" ; fifth, "non-drinking". Besides, the Chinese people generally regard "Chih-Jen-Yung" or wisdom, benevolence, and courage as three sublime moral laws of the universe ; the Indian people observe "Sila, Samadhi and Prajna" or asceticism, meditation and wisdom as the guiding lamps of human life. Principles of such a moral nature are too copious to be enumerated in detail.

So much for the similar features in our national life. As for the interchange of cultures between India and China, it has taken place for more than two thousand years. In the book of "Buddhacharita" or the classical biography of Lord Buddha, it is stated that Buddha once learnt from Visvamitra Acharin, who told him of many books among which one was a "Book of China". In another book called "Ratnakutha" or the great classics of Buddhist treasures, we also find the names of some Chinese feudal states, such as "Wu," "Shu," "Chin." Such records as appear in Chinese books are even far more in quantity. At a time when most of the modern strong nations had no shadow of existence yet, and when their peoples were still in a primitive state of life over an uncultivated land, our two countries India and China, had already achieved glorious and

brilliant civilizations, and our wealth and prosperity had reached a stage really superior to what the European and American Powers have attained today in the true sense of life. The essence of the present Western civilization of which the white races are so proud and for which the common people have so much envy and admiration is science. India and China possessed even in ancient times the beginnings of some sciences. Long, long ago, India had what we call in Chinese "Wu-Min," the Five sciences or "Pancha-Vidya" : first, the science of sound or "Sabda-vidya" ; second, the science of crafts or "Silpakarma-sthana-vidya" ; third, the science of medicine or "Chi-kitsa-vidya" ; fourth. the science of cause or "Hetu-vidya" ; fifth, the science of introspection or "Adhyatma-vidya." In China, we had what we call now "Lu-Yi", the six Arts : first, "Li" or propriety ; second, "Yo" or music ; third, "Sheh" or archery ; fourth, "Yu" or Coachmanship ; fifth, "Shu" or writing ; sixth, "Su" or Mathematics. Besides, there existed what were styled "Lu-Shu" the six writings and "Lu-Ching" the six classics, and many other studies of medicine, surgery, astronomy, astrology, pottery, architecture and the like. It is only of such things of the modern West as steamers, trains, air-planes and battleships, submarines, cannons, guns, bombs, tanks, poison gases, death rays and many other brutal weapons of bloodshed and massacre, that our two countries, India and China, had really had none.

The early facts concerning Indian and Chinese relationship of culture are found in various Chinese books, such as "Lieh-Tsu," "Chou-Shu-Chi-Yi" or the Book of Wonders of Chou, "Lie-Sien-Chuan" or the Biography of Fairies, "Shih-Lao-Chih" or Sketches of Buddha and Laotzu, "T'si-Lu" or the Seven Records, "Ching-Lu" or the Classical Records, and "Fu-Tsu-Tung-Chi" or the

Accounts of Buddha, etc. : but this is only a bare enumeration, not any adequate, systematic description. This is of course due to the remoteness of time and the complexity of circumstances. Any momentous event which happened in the world, and any intercourse which took place between the nations must first have a long period of growth before any clear and detailed records could be made about them. So the actual historical facts of our cultural interchanges are available only after the influx of Buddhism into China. The formal date for the first introduction of Buddhism into China is generally recognized to be the Yung-Ping tenth year of Min-Ti of Han Dynasty (67 A. D.) when the Emperor himself accorded Buddhism his royal welcome to the Capital Lo-Yang. But in fact, it is certainly not the Yung-Ping tenth year when Buddhism first entered China, it is also certainly not after the Chinese acceptance of Buddhism that our cultures began to have interchange. We can only say that Buddhism was first formally welcomed by a Chinese Emperor in Yung-Ping tenth year, and that the cultural interchange between India and China became more intimate and prevalent after the royal recognition of Buddhism. After this, great Indian sages and scholars came to China and learned Chinese monks and scholars travelled to India in large numbers at different times, carrying on the real work of cultural exchanges through the medium of Buddhism. According to the records of a Chinese book called "Li-Tai-Kao-Seng-Chuan" or the Biographies of Great Monks in Various Ages, there were two hundred Chinese monks who studied in India with great success, and twenty-four Indian sages who preached in China with marvellous achievement. But it must be remembered that there must have been many, many more monks and scholars who either perished on the way or disliked to leave their earthly names to posterity. In another

book called "Tang-Kao-Seng-Chuan", the Biographies of the great monks of Tang Dynasty, there is a poem of which two lines read as below :

"Away from Chang-An monks go West to learn.

Out of a hundred no ten do return."

From this we see that many are they who went to India but few are the fortunate who could return to China. This must also hold good with the Indians who toured in the East. At that time, those people had to pass on foot through Central Asia ; there were difficult deserts to cross, dense forests to pass, snowy mountains to cilmb, wild animals to encounter, terrible hunger and cold to suffer ; it took years of hardship for them to reach their destination through such difficulties. Such terrific trials and difficulties can easily be imagined, but their pious souls made them defy every trial and every difficulty. This brave, strenuous and persevering spirit of our ancient sages naturally commands our heartiest reverence and worship and consequently stimulates and increases our mental powers to strive on for the same cause.

With regard to the influence of Indian culture on the Chinese civilization, it is almost inexpressible in words. From the point of view of philosophy, the thoughts of Confucianists and Taoists had been closely intermingled with Indian thoughts since the dynasties of Wei (220-264 A. D.) and Tsin (265-419 A. D.) ; the process of assimilation was gaining momentum especially during the Tang Dynasty (678-906 A. D.) and in the subsequent age of the "Five Dynasties" (907-956 A. D.) till there was evolved in the Sung Dynasty (960-1276 A. D.) a new philosophy called "Li-Hsio" or New Rationalism. From the point of view of literature, the prose and poetry of Tsin and Tang Dynasties, and the records of philosophical discourses in the Sung and Ming (1368-1643 A. D.) Dynasties, had a

striking tint and flavour of Indian literature in form and in quality. Even the system of Chinese written language was affected by Indian influence : a certain Buddhist named Shou-Wen of the Tang Dynasty formulated thirty-six alphabets purely on the basis of Sanskrit words and then created a revolution in the pronunciation, sounds, and rhymes of Chinese words. And artistically China learned from India many methods, such as the building of pagodas, the making of statues, and the practice of fresco, etc. As for the translations into Chinese of Indian classical works, they may be regarded as a rare wonder in the world history of civilization, as far as perfection and quantity are concerned. No translation works of any modern nation can be a match for that Chinese treasury of abundance and superiority. In addition to a complete translation of the most improtant classics of Buddhism, there were also translated into Chinese many other classical works of ancient India. Let us take, for example, just a few of such best known books as were recorded in the catalogue of classical works of the history of the Sui Dynasty namely: "Brahman Astronomy", "Brahman Mathematics", "Brahman Medicine", "Brahman Astrology, Calendar and Mathematics", "Jiva: Rishi's Fatalism", "Gandhary: Mythology and Necromancy." All these books and some others amounted to tens of kinds and above a hundred of volumes. The only pity is that such valuable masterpieces are either unseen or lost at the present time. Even in the translated works of Buddhist classics, mention was occasionally made about the social and cultural affairs of India in addition to the religious philosophy, religious ceremonies and ascetic rules. In short, all the learnings, thoughts, systems, religious practices, social usages, and popular customs and habits of India have appeared more or less in the translated works of Chinese, and accordingly affected Chinese life to a considerable

extent. The theory of cause and effect, the belief in the cycle of life and death, and the faith in the wheel of reward and punishment have especially left vivid impressions deeply rooted in the hearts of the general masses of the Chinese people and become a firm, potent social force.

But on the other hand, the influence of the Chinese culture over the Indian civilization seems to be comparatively meagre and insignificant. In China, we can see everywhere things and objects of Indian style or model; but in India we can hardly see anything of Chinese origin. Some minutes ago, I made an allusion to Visvamitra Acharin who once told Buddha of many books including one called "A Book of China." Whether there is any such book still in India I do not know. It is also said in some Chinese book that the great Buddhist Hsuan-Tsang had translated into Sanskrit the Chinese classical book of "Tao-Te-Ching" or the Classics of Virtue by Lao-Tsu, but again my limited knowledge of Sanskrit prevents me from knowing if there is still existent any such text in Sanskrit today. Here is therefore a question worthy of our attention: since the Indian influence over Chinese culture has been so great why is the Chinese effect upon Indian culture so little? If we consider the merits of these two cultures, the religion and philosophy of India are, of course, supreme and unparalleled in human history, but the ethics and arts of China are also superior and matchless. And the Chinese classical works are capable of being translated and many of them should be translated, too; why were there so many Indian classical books translated into Chinese and yet none of Chinese great works rendered into Sanskrit? I have often sought for the reasons and I think there may be three of them: first, India might have been influenced by Chinese Culture for some time

but such influences dwindled away with the long lapses of time; secondly, the religious sentiment of the Indian people was rich and strong, so strong that they were behaving as all religious peoples do, only actively to teach their gospel to others but not passively to receive any gospel from others; thirdly, the Chinese mentality might be receptive and sensitive to absorb and assimilate any other good civilization but shy and reluctant to propagandize their own culture among others. At any rate, I feel China has received too much from but returned too little to India; she must, therefore, have the sense of gratitude and do the duty of reciprocation towards India.

Something; however, has China gratefully done for Indian culture though not directly but indirectly. It is that she has taken great care and made much effort to preserve, to cherish, to cultivate, and to magnify what she has got from India at different ages. Those translated works, quoted in the foregoing paragraphs, are really a precious treasury of parts of ancient Indian culture. and greatly deserve our patient investigation, if we want to understand dear old India thoroughly today. Some original works written by Chinese visitors to India, such as "Fu-Kuo-Chi" or Records of The Buddhist Nations by Fa-Shien, "Si-Yu-Chi" or Records of the Western Kingdoms by Hsuan-Tsang, and "Nan-Hai-Chi-Kuei-Chuan" or Messages from the South Sea by Yi-Tsing afford us typically valuable materials for the study of ancient India. These books of travels have been now translated into several foreign languages and are being studied by scholars and historians who take much interest in the research of the ancient history of India. What a great service have these books done to the preservation and magnification of Indian culture! But

perhaps the greatest service China has rendered to Indian civilization is her work in relation to Buddhism. It may be said that Buddhism was born in India, enriched in China, and then scattered over the whole world. I once metaphorically asserted that Buddhism was a beautiful young lady of India who was married to China, enjoyed a happy life, and has had a comfortable family of Children, grand-children and great grand-children. In order to do homage to her motherland, this lady must revisit her old home of India. Sastri Mahasaya and Prof. Kshitimohan Sen kindly added : "She must come together with her husband and all her children, too". How interesting and significant is this remark of these learned Professors ! It is, therefore, the duty of China to send her back and the duty of India to welcome her home.

So far I have related some true facts about the old intimate relationship between the culture of our two great sister countries. But for the last few centuries it is deplorable to say, that friendly relationship has some how dwindled and even stopped, probably on account of vicissitudes of life and changes in circumstances. At the same time the modern science of Europe rose so much in power and materialism, roared so loud for force that the so-called Industrial Revolution was brought about in the turbulent tide of the human sea. As the history of European civilization is short, their philosophy, their religion and their ethical thought are not mature and effective enough to control this raging tide ; then, woe to all, their means of production have turned out to be tools of destruction ! Their greed for gain and thirst for blood lead to the invention of sinful and murderous arms and weapons which, in turn, give rise to deadly wars and struggles. Every nation is mad, everything is wrong, and every place is distrurbed. The last Great World War is only the first outburst of this

materialistic insanity. Not only the West is troubled but also the East is suffering. Especially our two oldest civilized countries, India and China have fallen into the whirlpool of disasters and difficulties. The better the culture, the fiercer the attak. Our civilizations are now misunderstood ; our national systems, broken ; our social lives, distressed, and our peoples, despised. Consequently we are so busy with our own national concerns and strifes to deal with this mad tide of materialistic currents that we have no leisure to look after our old important and intimate national relationship of the past.

But spiritually, our national love for and sympathy with each other have never been cold, though the apparent formal connection is somewhat severed in course of time. As soon as opportnnity comes, we shall snatch it and renew our old relationship at any cost. Fortunately in 1924, just ten years ago, Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore, the Poet, accompanied by Prof. Kshitimohan Sen, Prof. Nandalal Bose and Prof. Kalidas Nag paid a visit to China ; it is this visit that marks the resumption of our old national friendship. The impression Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore gave us during his sojourn is even greater than what our sages did in the past. The Chinese generally regard Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi as the modern Buddhas of India. Gurudeva's works in English have been mostly translated into Chinese and the poems of "Stray Birds" and "The Crescent Moon" have created a new style of prosody in Chinese poetry at present. And there are in China now a Crescent Moon Society and a Crescent Moon Magazine, both of which, founded and directed by Dr. Hu Shih, are dedicated to the memory of the Great Poet-philosopher's visit to China. As for the Poet's ideal and hope to unite Asiatic cultures and to revive the Indian and Chinese cultural relationship, all of our

Chinese scholars have the sincerest sympathy with him and our leading scholars and leaders have also cherished for long the same idea and are willing to co-strive for the common goal with joint endeavours. Now is the time for India and China to resume and strengthen their cultural relationship.

Bearing in mind the importance of this point, I, in my humble way have initiated a movement to organise the Sino-Indian Cultural Society. The object of the Society will be to link up the learnings of our two countries, to interchange our cultures, to cultivate friendship between our peoples and lastly, to work for universal peace and human fraternity. In China, a good number of friends and well-wishers, most of whom, I may add, are our leading scholars and Buddhists, have already joined the Society. In India, I confidently hope your leaders of thought and culture will readily respond to our invitation and under the guidance of our revered Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore will work for the common goal.

The present world is in a state of confusion and chaos, and the brewing mischievous storms are even beyond our power of imagination. The more nations talk of love and peace, the deeper they envy and hate one another ; the more they seek for friendship, the fiercer they brandish their swords. It is terrible even to think of the fact that armaments are both openly and secretly being prepared, mysterious weapons of slaughter are being invented day and night. The scholars of politics and statesmen say, it is all a political problem, the students of economics and financiers say, it is all a problem of economy ; but really it is only a cultural problem of all the world. If the ultimate remedy is not sought from culture it is impossible to cure the current malady and to avoid the future catastrophe. The Powers of Europe and America have come to the end of

their wits in the labyrinth ; it is then urgently necessary for the Easterners, especially Indians and Chinese, to shoulder this duty of human salvation. I make this remark not because I have the least prejudice against or look down upon Europe and America ; but I am convinced that the misuse of the modern Western sciences and materialism is responsible for the imminent crisis and tribulations of the world. So a new outlet to human life must be researched out from the Eastern civilization, especially from the cultures of India and China.

I do not mean that all the modern Western sciences should be thrown away, but that the application of such sciences must be controlled, directed, modified, and adjusted by the benevolent and harmonious spirit of Indian and Chinese cultures, so that a new civilization wlll be brought about for the constructive benefit and betterment of all humanity. The enlightened persons of Europe and America who have been aware of the shortcomings of their own cultures are now all making efforts to find the healing medicine from the cultures of India and China. Hence, needless to say, we Indians and Chinese must wake up at once, and restore our old national relationship. By the interchange of our cultures we shall achieve our cultural renaissance ; by cultural renaissance we shall create a new world civilization; and by the new civilization we shall relieve all mankind. Our two countries having made a glorious world in the past, can we not make again a glorious world in the future ?

Tan Yun-Shan.

A lecture at Santiniketan,
1934.

MODERN CHINESE HISTORY

Political, Economic and Social.

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PROF. TAN YUN-SHAN.

Published By
THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY
WALTAIR, INDIA.

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Printed and published by P. K. Mukherjee at the
Santiniketan Press,
Santiniketan, Bengal, India.